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AUTHOR Christison, Milton; Sida, Donald
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ABSTRACT

One hundred and eighty-eight Georgia school system superintendents were polled in the Spring of 1976 as to their perceptions and experiences concerning the effects of school integration. This paper presents the results of this investigation. Three broad areas were selected for analysis: (1) integration outcomes affecting the public schools, (2) community-related integration outcomes, and (3) busing as an educationally justified method for accomplishing integration. An analysis of survey responses suggested that black students were perceived as being the primary recipients of educational benefits since school system integration. Specifically, it was the expressed view of the vast majority of responding superintendents that educational opportunities had increased for black students. Relatively few superintendents felt that there was a corresponding increase in educational opportunities for white students. Additionally, many superintendents expressed the view that educational opportunities provided for white students had actually decreased. A clear trend was in evidence with respect to black student school attendance. Indications were that black students were attending school more regularly than before school district integration. Superintendents' perceptions of integration outcomes clearly suggest that racial tensions between black and white students existed. Discipline problems also increased in integrated schools. Finally, the vast majority of responding superintendents believed that busing is not educationally justified as a basis for accomplishing integration. The results of this poll must be viewed with caution since there is the possibility that actual integration outcomes may differ from the perceptions of those held by the superintendents polled. (Author/AM)

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SHEDDING MORE LIGHT AND LESS HEAT ON THE RESULTS OF SCHOOL INTEGRATION: THE GEORGIA EXPERIENCE

by Milton Christison
and Donald Sida

Few topics can compete with school integration in elicitting intense emotional reactions. Views regarding school integration vary from considering it to be a great social experiment to regarding it as the greatest folly of the United States Supreme Court. One element of our society holds a legalistic orientation and stresses acceptance of court rulings, policies of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare as well as compliance with federal laws. Another, emphasizes the improvement of the human condition occurring as an outgrowth of school integration. Yet, to many Americans, integration is regarded as a live-with-it-or-else proposition complete with federal marshalls and wailing sirens.

One need only read a newspaper or switch to the evening news to realize that most publicity has been associated with factors related to the physical desegregation of the public schools.[1] Unfortunately, documented reports of the educational outcomes of integration are few-and-far-between. The bulk of available information has tended to suggest that desegregation/integration results in positive educational outcomes. It would appear unwise, however, to form any premature conclusions based upon so-called expert opinion or a limited reporting of integration-related experiences.

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One generally expects to find school systems reporting their more successful innovations in print. It is rare, indeed, to find an article in a professional journal attesting to the failures of a school, particularly when the school name is included. Then, too, one must be at least mildly suspicious of "success stories" eminating from the federal government. A good case in point is a past U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare publication which included information regarding the desegregation experiences of five school systems.[2] Based

upon a seemingly limited sampling, H.E.W. concluded that "...desegregation can be accomplished, and that it can be accompanied by an increase in the quality of education available to all children, whatever their racial, cultural, or ethnic backgrounds."[3] Logically, it could also be accomplished by a decrease in the quality of education. No information was provided by H.E.W. with respect to desegregation outcomes as related to other school systems. One can only speculate as to the experiences of thousands of other schools across the country.

The Present Study

The authors, in an attempt to gain insight into the experiences of a broad spectrum of school systems, elected to study integration outcomes utilizing an entire state as a base. The State of Georgia appeared to constitute fertile ground for investigation for several reasons. First, Georgia school desegregation came several years earlier than in many school systems in other parts of the country. Second, tremendous variations existed among Georgia school systems in terms of implementing desegregation plans. The desegregation program of one Georgia county was cited as an effective plan by H.E.W. and offered, by implication as a model to the rest of the country.[4] On the other hand, a number of school systems desegregated only after being placed under court order to do so.[5] Third, and perhaps most significant of all, Georgia school personnel have now had several years of experience in providing for the educational needs of students in an integrated setting.

The investigation consisted of a polling of Georgia public school superintendents (N=188) in terms of their experiences and perceptions of integration outcomes. Three broad areas were selected for investigation: (1) integration outcomes affecting the public schools; (2) community-related integration outcomes; and, (3) busing as an educationally justified method for accomplishing integration.[6]

Results of the Study

I. Integration Outcomes Affecting the Public Schools.

A. Educational Opportunities Provided for Students.

1. Black Student Educational Opportunities.

A large proportion of responding Georgia school superintendents (86%) indicated that the educational opportunities provided for Black students had increased since school district integration. Relatively few superintendents (2%) reported that Black student educational opportunities had decreased while one in eight respondents (12%) reported that the educational opportunities provided for Black students had not changed.

2. White Student Educational Opportunities.

Varied responses were offered with respect to the educational opportunities provided for White students since school district integration. Comparatively few superintendents (21%) reported an increase in White student educational opportunities while a somewhat greater proportion (30%) reported a decrease in educational opportunities provided for White students. Approximately half of the respondents (49%) indicated that the educational opportunities provided for White students had not changed since school district integration.

B. Student Achievement.

1. Black Student Achievement.

A majority of superintendents responding to the survey (71%) reported that the achievement of Black students had increased since school district integration. Few respondents (2%) reported a decrease in Black student achievement while one in four superintendents (27%) indicated that no achievement change was in evidence among Black students.

2. White Student Achievement.

Comparatively few respondents (22%) felt that the achievement of White students had increased since integration. A substantial proportion of superintendents (32%) indicated that the achievement of White students had decreased while nearly half of the respondents (46%) indicated that no change was in evidence with respect to White student achievement.

C. Student Attendance Patterns.

1. Black Student Attendance.

Nearly three-fourths of the survey respondents (74%) reported that Black student attendance had increased since school district integration. Relatively few superintendents (5%) reported a decrease in attendance with one in five superintendents (20%) reporting "no change" in Black student attendance patterns.

2. White Student Attendance.

The attendance patterns of White students revealed no discernible trend with one in four superintendents (25%) reporting an increase in White student attendance, one in five (20%) reporting a decrease and over half (55%) reporting "no change" in White student attendance.[7]

D. Discipline Problems in the Schools.

Approximately two-thirds of responding superintendents (68%) reported an increase in discipline problems since school district integration. Few respondents (6%) reported a decrease in discipline problems with one in four superintendents (26%) reporting "no change" in terms of discipline problems since school district integration.

E. Racial Tensions Between Black and White Students.

Nearly half of the responding superintendents (46%) reported an increase in racial tensions between Black and White students. A significant proportion of respondents (25%) reported a decrease in racial tensions while over a fourth of superintendents (28%) reported "no change" in terms of racial tensions between Black and White students.

F. Incidence of and School Success in Dealing with Integration-Related Problems.

One fourth of the responding superintendents (25%) indicated that "many problems" accompanied school system integration. A majority of respondents (63%) felt that "few problems" were associated with integration in their school district while one in eight superintendents (12%) reported no problems at all related to school system integration.

Only one in twelve respondents (8%) reported that integration-related problems are presently unsolved while the vast majority of superintendents (75%) report that problems are generally solved. Nearly one-fifth of the respondents (17%) indicate that their problems are "totally solved."

II. Community-Related Integration Outcomes.

A. School-Community Race Relations.

A relatively small proportion of superintendents (22%) reported that integration has resulted in better relationships between the schools and communities they serve. A majority of respondents (55%) believe that poorer relationships now exist between the schools and communities than before school system integration. -Approximately one in four superintendents (23%) reported "unchanged" relationships between the schools and communities they serve.

B. Race Relations in the Community.

Superintendents were querried as to their perceptions of race relations in the community following the integration of schools. A majority of responding superintendents (53%) felt that when all things are considered, the integration of schools has produced positive change in the relationships between races in the community. Approximately one-fourth of the respondents (27%) felt that integration had produced negative change in terms of community race relations with the remaining 19% believing that "no change" had occurred.

III. Busing as an Educationally Justified Method for Accomplishing Integration.

A final question was raised with Georgia school superintendents with respect to the educational justification of busing as a method for accomplishing integration. An overwhelming majority of superintendents (94%) indicated that they did not feel busing was educationally justified.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Georgia school system superintendents (N=188) were polled in the Spring of 1976 as to their perceptions relative to the effects of school integration. An analysis of survey responses suggested that Black students were perceived as being the primary recipients of educational benefits since school system integration. Specifically, it was the expressed view of the vast majority of responding superintendents that educational opportunities had increased for Black students. Relatively few superintendents felt that there was a corresponding increase in educational opportunities for White students. Additionally, many superintendents expressed the view that educational opportunities provided for White students had actually decreased. Apparently, many superintendents believe that there is, at least initially, a lessening of educational opportunities for White students as headway is made to more fully provide opportunities for Black students.

A similar situation may exist with respect to student achievement. Most superintendents reported gains in terms of Black student achievement while few reported gains for White students. On the other hand, nearly a third of the respondents reported decreases in White student achievement while only one per cent reported decreases in achievement among Black students. It would appear unwise to suggest that integration per se was responsible for declining White student achievement.[8] The establishment of numerous private schools, for example, has resulted in the loss of students who are at least economically advantaged.[9]

A clear trend was in evidence with respect to Black student school attendance. Indications are that Black students are attending school more regularly than before school district integration. No discernible trend was apparent, however, with respect to White student attendance. At this point one can only speculate as to why Black students are attending school more regularly. One possibility is that the educational needs of Black students are more fully being met and that Black students are "turned on" to school. A less positive but equally plausible explanation is that greater efforts have been made by school authorities to enforce school attendance since integration.

Superintendents' perceptions of integration outcomes clearly suggest that racial tensions between Black and White students have existed in many instances. Discipline problems have tended to increase since school district integration. In spite of this situation, schools have apparently come to grips with their integration-related problems as evidenced by the fact that fewer than one in twelve superintendents reported that their problems are "presently unsolved."

A somewhat puzzling situation exists with respect to community-related integration outcomes. On the one hand, most superintendents believe that poorer relationships now exist between the schools and communities they serve than before integration. On the other hand, a majority of superintendents believe that school integration has produced positive change in the relationships between races in the community. Finally, the vast majority of responding superintendents believe that busing is not educationally justified as a basis for accomplishing integration.

Recommendations for Further Study

The reader is cautioned that the results of this study are based upon responses related to superintendents' perceptions of integration outcomes. The authors are aware of the possibility that actual integration outcomes may differ from the perceptions of same held by Georgia school system superintendents. None-the-less, the perceptions of Georgia's chief school system officers are undoubtedly related to the educational decision-making process.

Clearly, a need exists to elicit information from other sources in order to more fully evaluate integration outcomes. Significant questions suggested as an outgrowth of this investigation might include the following:

--Do Black students perceive their educational opportunities as having increased since school integration? If so, how were changes affected?

--Do White students perceive their educational opportunities as having decreased?

--What factor(s) is/are responsible for the apparent increase in Black student attendance?

--Do achievement test data support the conclusion of many superintendents that Black student achievement has increased and that White student achievement has decreased?

--Are racial tensions as prevalent between Black and White students as available information would suggest? How are these tensions expressed? What are schools doing to resolve these tensions?

--What are the specific integration-related problems which existed and how were they resolved?

--Do persons, other than school system superintendents, believe that poorer relationships now exist between the schools and the communities they serve than before integration?

--Do communities-at-large believe that relationships between races in the community have improved?

--Do viable alternatives to busing exist as a basis for accomplishing integration?

NOTES:

[1]Violence or the threat of violence has received widespread publicity. See, for example, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Southern School Desegregation, 1966-67, 1967, pp. 47-51.

[2]U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare/Office of Education, Planning Educational Change:How Five School Systems Desegregated, Volume IV(Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969).

[3]Ibid, p.iii.

[4]Ibid, pp. 5-7.

[5]It appears likely that many Georgians were led to believe (even after the Brown decision) that the public schools would not be integrated. In 1955, then Governor Marvin Griffin was quoted as repeating his campaign pledge that "there will be no mixing of the races in the classrooms of our schools and colleges." In this regard see Reed Sarratt, The Ordeal of Desegregation:The First Decade (New York:Harper & Row, 1966), p.5.

[6]For an in-depth look at the busing question see Nicolaus Mills-(ed.), The Great School Bus Controversy (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1973).

[7]Responses do not reflect consideration of students who withdrew from public schools and transferred to private schools following Georgia public school integration.

[8]Assuming, of course, that White student achievement has in fact declined. The weight of previous research has failed to suggest that White student achievement has suffered. An excellent overview of the achievement question is included in Meyer Weinberg, Desegregation Research: An Appraisal (Bloomington, Indiana:Phi Delta Kappa, 1970), pp. 31-68.

[9]Opinions differ as to the extent of the White student exodus from the public schools. Morris, in appraising the situation existing in 1970, estimated that fewer than 5% of White students had left the public schools. In this regard see Willie Morris, Yazoo: Integration in a Deep-Southern Town (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 115.

GEORGIA SCHOOL INTEGRATION QUESTIONNAIRE *

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:

The school district presently has 664,000 students enrolled. The school district is primarily 104 rural; 15 Suburban; 13 Urban in composition.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS:

1. The achievement of Black students has (88 increased; 2 decreased; 34 not changed) since the school district was integrated.

2. The achievement of White students has (27 increased; 40 decreased; 58 not changed) since the school district was integrated.

3. The attendance of individual Black students has tended to (96 increase; 7 decrease; 26 did not change) since the district was integrated.

4. The attendance of individual White students has tended to (33 increase; 26 decrease; 71 did not change) since the district was integrated.

5. Discipline problems have (87 increased; 8 decreased; 33 not changed) since the district was integrated.

6. Integration of the schools has (60 increased; 33 decreased; 37 not changed) racial tensions between students.

7. Integration of the school district was accomplished with (33 many; 85 few; 16 no) problems in the school district.

8. Problems dealing with school integration are presently (11 unsolved; 100 generally solved; 23 totally solved) in the school district.

9. Integration of the schools may be viewed today as having (115 increased; 3 decreased; 16 not changed) the educational opportunities of Black students.

10. Integration of the schools may be viewed today as having (28 increased; 40 decreased; 66 not changed) the educational opportunities of White students.

11. If school integration could only be accomplished by busing children "extensively" in the school district I feel the results (7 would; 118 would not) be justified from an educational point of view.

12. The integration of the schools has resulted in (29 better; 73 poorer; 31 unchanged) relationships between the schools and the community.

13. In summary, when all things are considered, the integration of schools has produced (68 positive; 35 negative; 25 no) change in the relationships between races in the community.

*This Appendix represents a summary of responses offered by Georgia School System Superintendents (N=188). All superintendents did not respond to the questionnaire nor did all respondents react to all items.